TRANSCRIPT

February 20, 2003

NEWS CONFERENCE

SEAN O'KEEFE

NASA ADMINISTRATOR

MISSISSIPPI

SEAN O'KEEFE HOLDS A NEWS CONFERENCE FROM STENNIS SPACE CENTER

FDCH e-Media, Inc. (f/k/a Federal Document Clearing House, Inc.)

322 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE

2ND FLOOR, NE

WASHINGTON, DC 20002

Tel: 301-883-2482

Fax: 301-883-4977

NASA ADMINISTRATOR SEAN O'KEEFE HOLDS A NEWS CONFERENCE,

STENNIS SPACE CENTER

FEBRUARY 20, 2003

SPEAKER: SEAN O'KEEFE

NASA ADMINISTRATOR

O'KEEFE: First of all, I had an opportunity here, during the course of today, to visit here with so many of our tremendous professionals here at the Stennis Space Center, and spend some time, you know, talking through a variety of different programs and issues that are important here.

And, to be sure, the challenges of today's continuing, ongoing investigative effort that needs to be focused and attended to on the consequences of the February 1st tragedy of the loss of Colombia is foremost in our minds.

So much of what we do around this agency, though, is also focused on a range of Earth science, space science, biological and physical research activities, aerospace technologies and applications, a range of things that also are important and need to be continually attended to.

So much of the discussion we also had a chance to touch on today is the strategic plan that we're pursuing that came out along with the president's budget on February the 3rd, and the direction that we are pursuing in that regard to focus and be very selective about the kinds of things we're engaged in, to look at the three mission areas of understanding and protecting our home planet, of exploring the universe and searching for life, and inspiring the next generation of explorers--to view those three mission areas to be very dominantly the kinds of activities we want to excel at, do very well at what we do, and for those things that could be accomplished by a variety of other means that we look at those alternative methods of doing so, and instead concentrate on those three areas and those mission objectives and where we intend to go.

In addition to that, the strategic focus of what we're about is to look at what those technologies need to be that we have to develop in order to enable the capacities to pursue missions and objectives and goals that are identified as part of that longer-term set of strategic planning objectives.

And that would include things like conquering the limitations that we have on speed and the ability to traverse the solar system in an array of circumstances more than what we currently can do using today's present, known technologies.

It also means understanding the consequence of human endurance and how that may ultimately factor in to the combination of robotic as well as human intervention for future space missions.

And it also focuses, I think, very specifically on the near-term, kind of, objectives we have of enabling technologies in order to understand air traffic management better for all of us who, you know, work through the challenges of commercial space flight and commercial air transportation that would be involved therein. Looking at traffic management as well as a range of other capabilities in order to preclude the prospect of ever seeing, as we saw on September 11th, 2001, anyone who would ever want to use a commercial aircraft as a weapon against us again.

So there are opportunities to really look in a number of very targeted, specific areas that are laid out in our strategic plans, that are part of our focus of what the president proposed on February 3rd, and certainly previewed as part of his amendment last November that we spent time working through.

O'KEEFE: And that's every bit as important and critical as our continuing activities to determine what was the cause of the tragedy on February the 1st, how was Columbia lost, what are the corrections we need to do in order to work through the fixes that would be necessary to return to flight safely as soon as we have an understanding from the

Columbia accident investigation board's independent review on exactly what should be accomplished there.

We intend to support that activity with everything that we've got and as much as we possibly can in order to reach that understanding and to be guided by the judgments and recommendation by that independent board as expeditiously as they think is appropriate. We will act on those recommendations promptly, as soon as they are received.

Meanwhile, there's so many things we do around this agency that are so important for the continuing exploration and discovery agendas, that we are pursuing that with equal enthusiasm as well.

Thank you all for spending time. I appreciate you being here this afternoon. And I'll take a few questions.

QUESTION: I wanted to ask you, sort of, a big-picture question about the future of the shuttle.

Of course, in mid-1990s, the Clinton administration revised the national space policy to try and find a shuttle successor by the middle of this decade. And the two major reasons given for that, of course, were the fact that the shuttle was viewed as too expensive and too unsafe. And with the events of February 1st, I think statistically at least, the shuttle was probably now more unsafe and more costly to operate than ever before.

Talk a little about the direction of SLI, the change that--the change in direction you made last November to develop the orbital space plane. And are you rethinking that at all now as far as the need to get back maybe where you're working harder to develop a shuttle successor in the near term instead of 20 years out?

O'KEEFE: Sure. Well, first and foremost, I can't let the premise of your question go uncontested. I mean, it was a nice try, but I don't think there is any conclusion or any result that has--would support the conclusion on your part, as you've just asserted, in terms of what the operational safety conditions of shuttle might or might not be.

I don't know. You obviously have some superior knowledge on this point, my guess. But I don't know that--based on the evidence that's available today and the facts that are arrayed, what would drive us to the conclusion of saying, ``Here is a, you know, fundamentally challenged problem."

O'KEEFE: I mean, it's one that clearly it is absolutely bedeviling in terms of what caused this particular accident on February the 1st, a reentry that up, until 8:52 that morning, was--not routine; there's never a routine launch or entry, no matter how it's reported. Let me assure you, there never has been anything that has been routine about space flight. But it nonetheless is a case where everything until that time was no anomaly.

And so thereafter, in that six minutes that occurred after that point, it was very clear that there was--something went deadly wrong. And we're going to find out what that was, we're going to fix it, and we're going to get back to flying safely as soon as we can to support the activities aboard.

To your larger question--so, again, the premise, thank you for tolerating that--to your larger question, I think of wither the future of space flight and what assets would we use, I think you've described it exactly right on this point, which is orbital space plane, as we proposed back in November, that the president's amendment addressed very specifically, that the Congress just endorsed the other day as part of its appropriations deliberations and passed on. The president will be signing it any day or any minute now, the appropriations bill itself.

And from there, the fiscal year '04 budget that was forwarded, that is part of the February 3rd submission that the president made, is fully consistent with that same amendment.

That is a technology demonstrator, if you will, that gets us, I think, not only the capacity for crew transfer and return capabilities to station, but also demonstrates a couple of very important technology requirements that we would have for any reusable launch vehicle in the future, which is, one, something that's maneuverable, which the shuttle typically is not and wasn't designed to be, in space, as well as some flexibility on the capacity for launch that in part is one of the challenges we have with shuttle each and every time.

It's a design characteristic. It requires a very narrow window for launch capabilities. And that, again, is driven by where it is you want to go and how you get into that, you know, basic fundamentals of orbital mechanics.

O'KEEFE: But it is something that is a technology limitation based on that capability that the orbital space plane will give us at least an opportunity to look at as a mid-range requirement, not only for the purpose of being a transfer capability and for crew to International Space Station or rescue-and-return capacity, but also to demonstrate these technologies, to get through and conquer those kinds of technology limits that have been persistent for a lot of years.

So we're now at least methodically going about the business of saying, ``Rather than coming up with one vehicle that's going to conquer everybody's problems with what they think should be fixed about going to space flight, let's recognize that what we ought to do is we are in the equivalency of the age of sail in space exploration, let's knock down each of those technical limitations one big one at a time."

And that's exactly what orbital space plane will do for us, on a couple of fronts in addition to, I think, the elements of the reusable launch vehicle focus of the Space Launch Initiative that is a longer-term set of objectives that may ultimately replace the heavy lift capacity that shuttle now provides for us.

So, for all those reasons I think we've got, that's the longer-term set of objectives that aren't based on a Hail Mary pass, you know, for one program way out there that you have to hope everything's going to work on and go exactly right, and instead build it based on a set of near-, mid-term and longer-term objectives that will guarantee us the opportunity to get into the age of steam and out of the age of sail.

QUESTION: Could you explain in detail how the production schedule at the Michoud plant will be changed, and what the annual production rate will be and when those changes will go into place?

O'KEEFE: Not only can I not describe it in detail, I can't even describe it in general.

I mean, until the Colombia Accident Investigation Board makes a determination about what they consider to be the causes or probable causes of the accident on February 1st, we are avoiding making any determination about individual aspects and elements of the space flight program.

O'KEEFE: We are positioning and organizing ourselves in order to return to flight as expeditiously as we can, as soon as the Accident Investigation Board reaches its independent judgment of what they believe were the causes, or probable causes.

But in terms of trying to lay out some longer-term set of objectives, you know, that's not the case.

And I specifically had an opportunity this morning to meet with folks at Michoud to advise that this is absolutely nothing--there's no conclusions reached, no determinations made, the board has not made any findings of what they believe to be the circumstances. Instead, they're looking through, I think, all of the variables that could have lead to that case and until then have asked that--instructed that we really be very diligent about not foreclosing any opportunities in the future in terms of what's involved.

So more to come. I think they're working about it quickly, and I don't think it's going to be a long shot off before we have an idea of what the specific, as well as general, answer to your question will be.

QUESTION: Is it true that NASA was already redesigning part of the space shuttle external tank and changing the way the foam insulation supplied prior to Columbia's flight? And if so, in what way?

O'KEEFE: From what I understand--and, again, this is, like, as of this morning; this is knowledge that's a few hours old--there were a couple very minor design characteristic changes that were either under consideration, or are now the kinds of things we'd want to look at very specifically.

There is one particular feature of the external tank that looks for all the world like a ski ramp. It is a question of aerodynamically what is the best way to design that and focus on it.

It was a consideration and a factor before. But certainly at this point right now, no one is making any changes to any designs, until we find out what was the cause, or the probable cause, of this accident from the independent Columbia Accident Investigation Board.

But that is one of the factors they have been considering looking at, not because there was anything that suggests that there was any more or less safety-of-flight consideration, but because aerodynamically there may be a better way to look at this.

The other factor was, in the changes that have occurred over the last several years, is, as you suggested, a consequence of reducing the empty external tank from what is--what used to be, I'm told, on the order of about 70,000 pounds down to about 57,000, 58,000 pounds, which is where they roughly weigh at this point, which is amazing, because

given how thin these things are and how large they are, it's an amazing capability to reduce that much comparative weight off the capacity.

O'KEEFE: They've also had some different changes or alternatives that have been proposed over the years on applications of the external insulation, but none of which are things that are new, and certainly all rather heavily reported on lately. So there are no new huge revelations that are coming there that are being planned or considered at this juncture that I'm aware of.

QUESTION: Detail for me, sir, what images you've gotten from DOD assets and what those images show you.

O'KEEFE: Matter of fact, I've got an incomplete knowledge and understanding of what images came from all the different sources, but the Columbia Accident Investigation Board will have a very thorough compendium of that. And I believe their next press availability is not later than next Tuesday. I would strongly recommend you ask them that question for a very complete, very detailed answer that I'm sure they'd be prepared to give.

QUESTION: My question is, how certain are you that there will be future shuttle flights? And would you be willing, if the precise cause of the Columbia accident can't be pinned down, to fly anyway?

O'KEEFE: I guess I am not certain of anything in this life. February 1st reminds us all how risky this business is and how difficult it is to make a determination about what happens when you get a scant bit of information that up until 8:52 on the morning of the event everything was perfectly normal. Matter of fact, this was described by everybody I've talked to before the accident, on January 16th, the cleanest, absolutely most flawless launch, the most perfect weather. There was absolutely nothing that registered on the scale.

And over the course of the past year there has not been, until that time, one launch or one landing that I remember that wasn't altered or adjusted in some way, shape or form because of the weather, because of some anomaly, because of some concern that was raised before by hours, minutes or even seconds before the launch.

O'KEEFE: This was the first one that I had witnessed in my tenure that there was nothing, absolutely nothing on the screen that would suggest any operational problem whatsoever, launched 16 days, everything completely, you know, on cue; it was looking like the perfect mission.

So I am certain of nothing in this life. Even when you have a trend that tells you something as clear as that, that says this was lining up to be the mission that would become the model for all thereafter, and, obviously, it was not; it was nothing--you know, nowhere near that given the way it ended. So I am certain of nothing in this life.

We will not do anything--to the second part of your question--that would be every on the edge of reckless, or even close to it. We're going to make certain that what we know

about this particular incident, when we know it we'll inform a judgment about how we go about flying safely again.

There is nothing I know today, there's nothing I'm aware of at all, that would suggest that anything we did leading up to this flight, during its operations or upon reentry, that we should adjust the way we do business. So, therefore, I'm really looking forward to the independent judgment of the Colombia Accident Investigation Board to advise us what it is we need to do.

And there's a procedure for this, and a precedent for it, as well, of how those kinds of investigations may inform various operational changes prior to completion of a report or whatever else. And Admiral Gehman referred to that just two days ago in his last conference. And if memory serves me right I think you were there.

So there is a specific set of procedures of how they'll go about it. We'll be guided by what they tell us, we'll be guided by their findings, and we will not fly again until we can find what the correction is that we believe addresses either the cause or probable cause of the accident, and will then, in turn, give us an opportunity to fly safely as soon as we can practically do so.

QUESTION: As you were saying, the first thing you're looking for is a convincing prime suspect for the cause of the loss of Columbia. What's your best guess when you'll find that prime suspect--days, weeks, months? And because of the lack of water on the International Space Station, what is your thinking today about sending a two-person caretaker crew up there on the Soyuz TMA-2 I believe that's launching on April the 26th?

O'KEEFE: Well, on the first case, I'll take a pass. I have no favorite theory on this one, and I've seen nothing that would suggest that anybody else ought to have a favorite theory either.

I think the approach that we're working on the Columbia Accident Investigation Board is really fixated to is examining all of the variables that could lead to a fault, if you will, that could cause such an accident. Again, given the information we've got and all the telemetry and everything else that was aboard the sensors on the spacecraft that day, and for the 16 days prior to that, that's the information we're analyzing in great detail, as well as the reentry patterns and everything else, to inform the Columbia Accident Investigation Board's independent judgment of what could have caused this.

So there is no favorite theory I see out there and nothing that is so overwhelming or so prevalent in its logic to say we ought to abandon every other avenue to go concentrate exclusively on one direction.

So, if anything, I think we're supporting at NASA all of the--as are a lot of other federal agencies and other folks, the collection of all the evidence and facts we can find, to keep every avenue open for the Columbia Accident Investigation Board to make a determination.

And we are shutting down none of those avenues until specifically advised by them as to when we ought to discontinue analysis or research on one area and focus attention on another. And so we're guided by that each and every step of the way.

On International Space Station, the limitation right now--please don't misunderstand--there's not a limitation of water today. I think you correctly state that there is ample supply aboard International Space Station right now to support the three-person crew--Ken Bowersox, Don Pettit and Nikolay Budarin--through June.

The issue really is whether you want to anticipate not only a return to flight, but also other flight options that would give a return capability by that time. And, again, the pacing item is the resupply, primarily water as well as other resupply efforts, that would have typically gone aboard shuttle.

So we'll need to make a judgment about that, and pretty soon, because as you suggest, at the end of April is the regular scheduled Soyuz return vehicle launch. This is the emergency egress vehicle, it's always permanently attached to International Space Station, which they will fly home, the one that's currently attached, and leave the one that they will launch in late April.

And the issue then is whether or not to fully complement a return or a relief crew of the Expedition 6, those three astronauts and cosmonauts who are aboard right now, or whether you look at some other complement. And we're looking at all those options, and we'll be looking at a conclusion here within a matter of a few days, as a matter of fact, in terms of which preferred directly we want to go.

QUESTION: Following up on that, you know, everybody I talk to about ISS says you really can't keep the craft staffed much past the end of the year even with two-person crews, unless the Russians are able to pull the Progress that's now scheduled, I guess, for January into the November-December time frame. Today, Yuri Koptev in Moscow said that they've gone to ESA and asked for funding in exchange for possible permanent ESA crew slots on either caretaker crews or permanent crews downstream.

I'm wondering, philosophically, since you guys are barred by law from helping fund any of these things, A, how important it is to keep the station staffed; B, if you have any concerns about any negotiations the Russians are doing with ESA in terms of crew slots in exchange for money to accelerate or complement the development of Progress vehicles.

QUESTION: I know that Fred Gregory's having a meeting today in Washington about all this. I know you're not going to usurp him, but just philosophically if you could talk about the value of keeping the station staffed through the end of the year and what those challenges are.

O'KEEFE: Well, let's see, philosophically there's Aristotle, there's any number of different sources to consult on this.

Look, I really just want to reemphasize, we've got 16 different nations that are participants in an International Space Station venture that is the most extraordinary scientific and research capacity that collectively this many countries could ever have dreamed up doing. It's just an astonishing capability and one that you simply can't duplicate here on Earth in terms of its laboratory conditions.

It is worthy, then, of the time and attention we have put to it. Is it still a year away--or better yet, now I should probably say six flights away from a core configuration, that is the fundamentals that you build out all of the other laboratory capacity that was envisioned for it, and so it's really a work in progress still.

It is two and a half years into continuous human presence that we've experienced now since early 2000. But at the same time it's one that I think is a capability that we ought to be careful about how we continue to support it, and aspire to completing it to achieve its ultimate capacity and capabilities that we could envision.

There are 16 nations engaged in this. How we treat each other and work through this in times of challenge like we see today is the reason why this kind of partnership was put together, and that we didn't go off alone or any others in tandem or anything else.

So the continuing activity is this is something that I think everybody, every member I see and have talked to are dedicated to make the objectives of the International Space Station, we will work this together as a partnership, and I'm gratified to see that their interest in doing so is matching the support and commentary that's always been offered that I've heard over the course of the last year in my tenure of our goals of maintaining this capability.

So I think they're matching their commentary with action, and certainly, as you discussed, there is a lot of continuing discussion and debate going on as, you know, Jay's (ph) question just alluded to a few moments ago in terms of the opportunities for continued support of it for a longer period, and I don't think anybody has determined what the maximum end is or period of time is for which we could support the station.

We're still looking at that and we're looking at every permutation. And every partner is acting like a partner, a very strong participant in what the solutions on this should be.

QUESTION: Next week you'll be testifying in the House Space Subcommittee on NASA's '04 budget. Can you tell us if you plan to ask for any significant changes there? And if so, what are they?

And also, would you comment on what NASA's role is in homeland security?

O'KEEFE: The president of the United States submitted a budget on February the 3rd that calls for a $15.5 billion program for fiscal year 2004. We have a strategic plan that backs up the purposes of that, as well as an array of programs that would support that objective.

My intention next Thursday is to advocate to the Congress that they support the president's request as enthusiastically and as expeditiously as they possibly can. That document says it all.

As far as homeland security is concerned, yes, there are a number of different capabilities that we have for earth science, kind of, applications, for example, that measure the climate, as well as geological change and formations that we see here on Earth that have applications in a variety of different cases that are of utility.

There are also a number of--again, I alluded to in my early opening comments, of examination of air space management, as well as air traffic management for commercial aircraft that we're engaged in in order to maximize the efficiencies that may be garnered in this now heightened security environment we've all been living with here in the United States since September 11th, 2001.

So there's a number of different contributions we make and continue to make, and we'll work with Secretary Ridge and all of his folks in trying to determine how we can best contribute to that. And there are a lot of ways they've identified that we have and should continue to do so.

QUESTION: You visited with the folks at Michoud and here at Stennis today. Were you able to offer them any assurances that there wouldn't be any cutback in the work force while this tragedy is investigated?

O'KEEFE: Well, you know, again, I was most impressed with the professionalism and dedication, diligence that everybody at Michoud, and certainly here at Stennis, demonstrate each and every day in what we're engaged in, and recognize that the challenge that we're dealing with right now.

And our attempt and objectives, I think, collectively is to not make any precipitous decisions here until we find out what caused this accident, make the corrections and get to flying safely. Anything we could do or would be done that would compromise that set of objectives I have a real hard time with.

And so the focus that is under way now is to be as diligent as we can be, and guided by the Colombia Accident Investigation Board's independent judgment about what it is may have caused or is the probable cause. And they are expeditiously--I think very impressively--making decisions about releasing certain, you know, management actions as well as continuing efforts that they think are useful, and at Michoud a lot of folks that were engaged in the continuing production of external tanks have now been approved to head back to that activity by the Colombia Accident Investigation Board.

So I don't see any assurances required or possible from us, from NASA. It is really going to be driven by the Colombia Accident Investigation Board's independent judgment of what they think was the cause or probable cause of the accident, and then our responsibility to get about the business of fixing it expeditiously and get back to flying safely.

So that's what I talked about today, and I think everybody's enthusiasm, here at Michoud and, I think, across the entire NASA family and community, is to expeditiously get about doing that and be diligent about what we can do to assure that as rapidly and as responsibly and as responsively as we possibly can.

QUESTION: Forgive me if you answered this already but we had to take a detour because of a minor gas leak, so we were a few minutes late. But why are you at Stennis now? What precipitated this visit?

O'KEEFE: Everybody's got to be somewhere, you know, I mean, you know?

(LAUGHTER)

Gee, and I love being here. What do you mean? I mean, this is--I'm from Louisiana originally, so it's a nice place to be, there's no doubt about it.

O'KEEFE: It was an opportunity to spend time--and I mentioned this up front, so I'm sorry that you got detoured around, but, you know, I'll be very brief--it is an opportunity to, kind of, explore some of the objectives of our strategic plan that were released as part of the February 3 budget submission the president just made. And to think about all the other things we do in this agency. And we do lots of them. And we'd either be attentive and focused to those challenges and activities while at the same time being diligent about running to ground what caused this terrific accident.

Also an opportunity to have stopped at Michoud and spend a little time there to now at least get as up to speed as the burgeoning number of foamologists that seem to have come forward here in the last two weeks, an unbelievable collection of expertise that suddenly has grown out of nowhere, folks who seem to know an awful lot about foam, and writing about it a lot. So, you know, it was an opportunity to at least, kind of, get a fraction as conversant as others think they are who are writing about these things, and spend a little time with the folks at Michoud, pursuant to the previous question, really exploring what our options and avenues will be in the future and measuring, or taking measure of, the morale and enthusiasm there.

And I'd say it's really high. These are folks who are really attentive to the detail and very professional, extremely focused on what needs to be done and being serious about how we go about finding the conclusions to this.

QUESTION: One more question please, just one quick one on the budget increase. No, is that budget going to be increased? You mentioned $15.5 billion?

O'KEEFE: Yes. It is.

QUESTION: Will Stennis see a portion of that?

O'KEEFE: Geez, I have to go back and take a look at the specifics of all 10 of our centers and the programs that are managed from each, but I would commend to you that on our web site is all of the budget detail information, and in that is a number of different specific programs that different centers are all collaborating on and what the operating budgets are of each of the individual centers involved.

So I think folks here--and what I'm impressed with at Stennis and in every center, for that matter, but here particularly so--is folks are focused on the specific programs they're involved in, not whether or not they saw, you know, a dollar difference as a measure of success or failure of what the operating budget is. They're really focused on what the programs they do here are and how they contribute to what we do at NASA. And they're doing a fantastic job, right here at Stennis.

QUESTION: In the first few days after Colombia, there were some comments from NASA on the foam issue, and, just paraphrasing, the consensus seemed to be that, based

on the analysis and the previous testing, that you guys felt that that wasn't the root cause or may not be the root the possible cause.

QUESTION: The investigating board has said recently that's now back on the table, as well as other theories as to what might have gone wrong.

Looking back, do you think it might have been a mistake, or maybe premature, to make those comments?

O'KEEFE: Well, let me put it this way. I think the NASA position since day one, and to this date, has been there is no favorite theory. There is no one cause that we believe is more likely than another.

We have been going about this in a very methodical, extremely disciplined approach. One of the things I had an opportunity to see at Michoud, as a matter of fact, was what this conceptual debate, you know, or concept is of a fault tree analysis, all of you have read about this or heard about it or written about it yourselves.

Well, a fault tree analysis, just on the external tank--and they've got a room that's as big as this that they're working through every possible permutation of every scenario that anybody could come up with on a computer-generated model of what could possibly have caused this.

And that's not unique, that's just on the external tank. This is also going on at Johnson Space Center, it's going on at Marshall Space Flight Center, it's going on here at Stennis. You name it, all around--at Kennedy--all around the agency looking at individual parts of the fault tree of the approach that could cause this particular problem, leading with what the accident, what happened, then from there back and into this.

So in that regard there is no end to the focus, I think, that's being attended to this, and more importantly I think no one, from the minute that we have started off, the NASA position, as well as the Colombia Accident Investigation Board, the independent board examining this, has been it's all on the table, it has always been so.

What I think has been reported is a number of folks who have been asked what their opinion is, what are they thinking, how do they feel? And those are important.

O'KEEFE: That's fine. I mean, we're--this is an open agency. We're a public agency. We are dedicated to making sure that everybody has access to everything we know and what we're working on. We have nothing to hide.

And so in the process of doing so, if anyone wants to interpret the views, opinions, what you're thinking, any of that to being a position other than the one I just articulated, that's the judgment or the exercise you've just gotten by leaping to a conclusion, all right?

It is exactly as I've said it. There is no favorite theory, there is no favorite approach to this, there is no preferred cause, there's nothing right now that would be argued as the most likely condition that I've seen yet.

And that is also the view of the Colombia Accident Investigation Board, I am advised, just by listening to the same press conference you saw two days ago. So I'm under no more or less knowledge of that than anybody else is in that case.

But I think we're all diligently focusing on that area, and I do not have any problem whatsoever with any member of the public, any other agency folks who are participating, any of our people, offering what they think might have led to this tragedy. Because we want the benefit of all that thinking.

This is not about trying to figure out who did what, where. It's to figure out what happened, how do we fix it, and how do we get back to flying safely as expeditiously as possible.

STAFF: Thank you very much, Mr. O'Keefe.

O'KEEFE: Thank you, I appreciate it.

END